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Muhammad Bello and the Political System of Leadership in Sokoto Caliphate: A Vital Means for Good Governance in the Contemporary Society

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Abstract

This study delves into the political system of Muhammad Bello, the visionary second Sultan of the Sokoto Caliphate to uncover valuable lessons for modern governance. Bello's leadership exemplified a unique blend of Islamic principles, intellectual discourse, and strategic expansion. The objectives are to analyze the key features of Bello's political system, examine the impact of his leadership on the Sokoto Caliphate and derive lessons for contemporary society. The paper employed historical research methodology on Bello's reign and critical analysis of primary and secondary sources thereby making a comparative study of Islamic governance models. The study finds that Bello's political system showcased principled leadership guided by Islamic values. Inclusive governance through intellectual discourse, holistic development strategies with strategic expansion and diplomacy. This research contributes to the understanding of Islamic governance, leadership, and development, offering insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners seeking to address modern governance challenges.

Keywords: Muhammad Bello; Sokoto Caliphate; Islamic Governance; Leadership; Development; Contemporary Society.

Introduction

The Sokoto caliphate was a revolutionary movement that sought to establish an Islamic government in what is now Nigeria. The Caliphate headed by Muslim Scholars reformed the society by establishing governance based on Islamic Principles. Islam and literacy are intricately intertwined; they are tied up together. This is because the more learned a person is, the more reformed he is expected to be, and the more distant he stays from animalistic life. The Islamic

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educational traditions are deeply associated with every aspect of human life. This made the Jihad Scholars pursue educational reforms in an accelerated mode.

One of the results of the Jihad activities of the nineteenth century was the spread of Islamic and mundane education in Arabic throughout the western Sudan. This had been important before the Jihad of the nineteenth century, but as a result of these Jihad activities, education spread at an unprecedented rate [1]. Education is one of the agents of development as it enhances empowerment which in turn leads to human development. Perhaps this explains why education occupies a central place in the Jihadists' building activities. They lamented how people in Hausaland were left in ignorance as a result of which illiteracy became prevalent. In many instances, they criticized Scholars of the region for neglecting the education of the people, particularly women. To remedy the situation, they adopted the Principle of mass literacy as an educational policy. Through such efforts, they succeeded in creating a knowledge-based society. Scholars and students did not stop at pursuit of knowledge only but they passed it to others through its transmission. Through such a method education was made available to all seekers of knowledge. This endeared people to the Jihad leaders [2]. Masajid, open spaces, and residences of scholars and prominent individuals were used as learning centers. Home Schools, Quranic schools, and 'Ilimi schools flourished [3]. The Impact of such a comprehensive approach manifests itself in the level of literacy achieved. This is who they were rightly guided. This is because Islam is a knowledge-based system of life. Hence without education, hardly you get people organized.

Nigeria had experienced various types of governments under different military and civilian regimes which were headed either by Muslims or Christians. Despite these, religious and social differences between the two sets of people, the mode of their administration was almost the same. The system they used and is still in use is guided by a constitution, which has not yielded much good results for the people of the country. This is because the system was founded on secular ideals, which have little recognition of the rich heritage of the great majority of Nigerians [4]. On this, Tukur explains:

A constitution, a set of institutions, a structural framework, and procedures, cannot function satisfactorily and create viable organizations for the control and management of society's affairs if they are not firmly rooted in the Tatter's culture, traditions, values, habits and behaviors pattern as they appertain the political issues. If these conditions are satisfied, the polity can become a stable and cohesive nation processing political administrative organs capable of securing effectively the interest of the community as a whole and of allowing citizens to participate properly, in the exercise of power over their destiny and all the resources of the land [5].

Method

The research methodology adopted in this paper is a literature study approach. The study of literature is the same as research in general, but the data obtained by the researchers is secondary data using the literature study and historical methods. Some steps that the researchers will take in preparing this article include: first, the researchers search for and collect reference sources relevant to this research's theme. Second, several scientific papers that have been collected are then processed and elaborated, to comprehensively explain the inter-sections of this article. Third, an assessment of the contributions of Sokoto Jihad Leaders to good governance in the entire caliphate.

Result and Discussion

Muhammad Bello

The ideas and philosophy of Islamic scholars who have excelled and are famous in Islamic scholarship are referred to as Islamic political thought. The thought of such scholars has also been subsumed or rather encapsulated as a course of study in the various academic citadels of learning. The articulated ideas of Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Batuta among others have been immense to the development of Islamic political thought.

Muhammad Bello was the fourth child of Shaykh Uthman bin Fodiye, from his wife Hawwa'u. Both his parents and grandparents were learned in Islam. So he grew up in a scholarly family with a great reputation in scholarship [20]. According to Waziri Gidado, in his *al-Kashf Wal-Bayan*, Muhammad Bello was highly gifted with intelligence, understanding, wisdom, retentive memory, eloquence, and a mastery of Arabic language such that within a short period, he reached a certain stage of learning which not be easily reached by anyone else in a long period [21].

These personal qualities and the environment prepared, the ground for Muhammad Bello to become a great scholar, military commander, writer, and above all the second Amiral - Muminin which he inherited. Hence, Muhammad Bello was a great personality of great standing worthy of emulation [22].

Muhammad Bello and His Concept of an Islamic State

Before talking about Bello's concept of an Islamic state one has to pin-point how Bello perceived Islam. Bello's upbringing under the care of his mother, father, and uncle Abdullahi, made him perceive Islam as they perceive it, that is as a complete and comprehensive way of life based on divine guidance, in which all aspects of life - social, political and economic, etc. are regulated by the Shari'ah [23].

The situation in the Central Bilad al-Sudan at that time was economic retrogression, social injustices, political dictatorship and tyranny, and worst of all mixing Islam with the un-Islamic practices of the pagans. These problems, especially the latter, disturbed the parents of Bello most. Hence, they nursed the idea of reform or at least in the initial stage the enforcement of Amr Bil Ma'aruf Wannahayi annil Munkar [24].

Therefore, Bello's perception of Islam was shaped by his family's background and the orthodox Muslim leaders. According to Yamusa, Bello took to the early Muslim leaders as his ideals and leaders worthy of emulation and therefore his source of inspiration [25].

This was evident from his reference to some of the activities of people to Abubakar (1st Khalifa), Umar (2nd Khalifa), Ali bin Abu Talib and others. Hence his perception of Islam was never different from the definition given by the Prophet (S. A. W.), the Khulafa'ul - Rashidin and his parents. To them, Muslims are bound by the shari'ah, as the divine guidance regulating some devotional obligations, personal status, and regulations on government and administration, as distinct from the Kufr system [26].

Bello's conception of an Islamic state, therefore, is very clear and manifested in his Book- Usul - ul-Siyasa which was advice on Islamic rule, as requested by the Amir of Katsina, Mallam Umaru Dallaji [27]. From the Usul, Muhammad Bello had divided the state parts- the office of the state into three components the office of the Amir (governor), the officials (bureaucrats), and the commoners. Concerning the leader, he said.

As for the ruler, he should be pious and far from liking leadership for its pleasure; otherwise, he will be inclined to his position to achieve his interests.

Anybody found to be asking for it (leadership) will likely succumb to temptations and fall into bad practices contrary to the norms of Shari'ah. The

Imam should be in the Company of the scholars, listen to their advice, be generous, tolerant, and always ready for sacrifice or else his people will desert him [28].

These qualities, Al-Masri said, are exactly in conformity with the qualities of leaders as mentioned in Shehu's book Bayan wujub al-Hijrah ala-al-bad. Muhammad Bello went on to say that the Imam should provide social welfare and amenities to the subjects by encouraging all sorts of legitimate undertakings. Similarly, he emphasized that fortresses, bridges, markets, and roads should be constructed and maintained to add to the prosperity of the state [29].

As regards the role of the state bureaucrats (officials), Bello warned, "The ruler should always be on his guard against their possible disloyalty - they can

deceive, make injustices and services for their benefits - he should have firm control over them and none should be selected to the office on favoritism ", Bello had practically demonstrated this when after the death of the first Amirs of Kano and Zaria, he appointed entirely different people not from the incumbent's families, but based on the merits and qualities of the appointees [30].

To the common men, Bello emphasized that "their conduct will certainly reflect the conduct of the ruler. If they behave well, Allah will cause their rulers to have sympathy for them. But if on the other hand, they misbehave Allah will cause their rulers to ill-treat them". Therefore, Muhammad Bello's conception of an Islamic state tallies with that of his father, who was the first Amir al-Muminin on the birth of the state (Hiirah to Gudu) [31].

The Jama'a appointed him the Imam (leader), under the Qur'an and hadith of the Prophet which emphasizes that even if there were three people on a journey one should be appointed as the Amir. Similarly, he advised that the leader should have those eleven qualities mentioned in the Bayan wuiub al-Hirah.

Muhammad Bello's System of Government

From his idea of state (above) his perception of government i.e. bureaucracy could be seen in his categorization of officials' functions or arms of the government.

It could be recalled that even before the death of the Shehu, Muhammad Bello was given the responsibility of administering the Eastern Zone of the Caliphate. Therefore, even when he assumed the leadership role of Amirul-muminin after the death of the Shehu, he had some experience of governance. But at the same time, he did not neglect the warning of the Shehu on statecraft. The Shehu was reported to have said:

One of the swiftest ways of destroying a kingdom is to give preference to one group of people over another [32].

As evident from the Majmu of Abdulqadir bin Gidado. There was diversified tribal representation in Bello's administration.

According to Muhammad Bello, the office of the Wazir, is the second most important arm of the government. The leader must appoint deputies to assist him in the administration of the state. The Chief among them was the Wazir, who had some delegated authority and whose functions included the ability to organize the army for military expeditions as well as to supervise tax – collection [33].

To this effect. Bello appointed Wazir Gidado to lead a joint army from the Eastern Emirates to fight El-Kanemi's expedition in 1827. He (Wazir) always took

his place by the side of Bello, both in war and at the Council. As Shebu pointed out in the Bayan, the role of the Wazir is to awaken the Khalifa whenever he is asleep give him insight if he cannot see, and remind him if he is heedless. Bello's idea of the office, strictly speaking, is the idea of the Shehu [34]. To this day, this office is very powerful and important, in the Sokoto Sultanate. To a great extent, it has remained the only office that still maintains its original status and functions.

As for the Umara (Emirs) who control the leadership of the Emirates, Muhammad Bello said:

"The Amir should possess qualifying attributes similar to those of the Wazir with delegated authority and functions as legal administrators, policy making, supervision of soldiers, distribution of booty, appointing district heads and judges, etc. and be responsible to the Khalifa [35].

The Institution of the Shariah (Islamic law) crowned the political ideas of Muhammad Bello. He strictly employed Shariah, in trade transactions, works and services, education, agriculture, bureaucracy, -personal relations, international relations, etc. During his reign, judges were appointed on qualifications as laid down in the Bayan Wujub such as male, wise, equitable, sound knowledge and integrity, brave, versed religiously, and not liable to shake under the blows of fate. To this effect, Bello one time, conducted a test for the appointment of Qadi in Katsina. It was also in the bid to enforce shariah effectively that Muhammad Bello created new offices such as the police chief, the Treasurer, the Office of the Zakat Collector (sa'i), and leaders of professional organizations like the butchers, blacksmiths, etc. This opportunity created a forum whereby their members can put in their requests and grievances to the authority [36].

In short, the above unveiled the political ideas of Muhammad Bello, and when he got the opportunity of becoming the Amirul-Muminin, as Ibrahim Suleiman has observed,

being a product of a revolutionary climate ... therefore in all spheres of life he left no stone unturned [37].

Bello's Government and Policies

Muhammad Bello ascended the leadership of the Sokoto caliphate immediately after the death of his father, Shaykh Uthman bin Fodiye. The first and most serious challenge that faced him was the rebellion of some people like the Kabawa, Tuaregs, and the remnants of Gobir forces, who renounced their homage. Bello was able to settle not only those but even their arch-enemies along the border with Bornu Empire [38]. Therefore, after he died in 1837 AD, he was

able to consolidate the Islamic state and establish a very powerful administrative machinery that was never equaled in the history of West Africa [39]. In light of the above information, let's have a closer look at the policies of Muhammad Bello during his 21 years' reign as the Khalifa, and relate it to contemporary Nigeria.

The first important area that Muhammad Bello had taken seriously was his exemplary personality in the leadership of the caliphate and its general affairs. Like his father, Bello emphasized a simple and austerity life. It could be recalled that his father (Shehu) died leaving nothing behind and possessing only one gown, a pair of trousers, and a turban. Equally, Muhammad Bello, said Shagari solely relied on making mats and ropes of "Kaba" to earn his living and support his family. This position of Bello is even though he was the Amirul-Muminin of the state. That is, having every opportunity to possess and accumulate riches as he could, like what contemporary leaders are doing now. But he did not. He relied only on his legal earnings [40].

On social and interpersonal relations, the Shehu had always been preaching equality of all in Islam. That is why his Jama'a (community) was composed of people of varying descent, among whom were almost all the tribes and communities found in central Sudan. Similarly, Bello's perspectives as contained in the *Infag al-maysur fi Tarikh Bilad al Takrur* were never narrow. His cabinet was made up of learned men irrespective of their origin or tribe [41].

When it comes to the question of women's rights and "Liberation", the Jihadists made a record that has not been beaten hitherto. The Shehu and the companions condemned the attitude of the traditional Ulema of keeping the women ignorant of their religion and the world around them. To this type of Ulama. Shehu said,

they treat their wives and daughters like tools ... when they are spoiled,
they are thrown on the rubbish heap [42].

Hence, he gave equal educational opportunities to both his daughters and Sons. Notable among Bello's sisters who made tremendous the Jihadist literature were Hafsat, Maryam, and Nana Asma'u, the latter was reported to have written very famous prose and poems both in Arabic, Fulfulde, and Hausa. She had even been publically organizing lectures for female students. Of course, Bello patronized and continued with this tradition which was laid down by his father [43].

On land use policy, Muhammad Bello was guided by the land policies of the Prophetic period and that of the rightly guided Khalifs. Land use was given some prominence because of its central and crucial place not only in matters

concerning agriculture but equally in matters relating to taxation, distribution of resources, and above all, Jihad in the defence of Darul-Islam [44].

To this effect, Bello settled down the nomads and advised them to reduce their number of cattle and increase their camels, horses, sheep, and goats. Similarly, he settled the long dispute that existed between the nomads and the farmers. He used to provide an escort to the nomads' seasonal movement of their herds in search of pasture. This gesture brought about some security to both the farmers and the nomads [45].

One more area that received the attention of Muhammad Bello was the Bayt-al-mal or the Public Treasury. According to him; (the bayt-al-mal is the totality of the resources to which Muslims have an unqualified right and which does not belong to a particular group of or specified people).

The Bayt-al-mal serves the purpose of storing all state resources and as the treasurer for the handicapped and the needy. The treasury was maintained through legal means such as legal taxes, Jizya, and the collection of zakat. The tax of Kharaj (poll-tax), Bello stated, "should be levied with due regard to what the land bears concerning its fertility or infertility: and the current prices of produce, the decrease or increase thereof and concerning the irrigation of the land and the burden, in essence, the poor man was liberated from the excessive taxes which were levied during the Habe rule without taking anything into cognizance [46].

To the non-Muslims within the Islamic state Muhammad Bello followed the well-defined Islamic regulations. In this respect, they (non-Muslims) were supposed to abide by the terms of their treaty of existence with the Muslims.

This includes "the inbuilt provision that they keep their land and property if they give Jizya, for the security they enjoy from the state. Similarly, they enjoyed the rights of religious worship without interference, and the protection of their life and property. This principle was strictly followed by Muhammad Bello, and even today it is manifested where we find the existence of "Pockets" of non-Muslims amid the then Islamic state, such as Sokoto metropolis in Sokoto State, Zuru in Kebbi State and many others in Northern Nigeria.

Lessons for Contemporary Society

The above analysis reveals that there are a lot of lessons to be learned from the tremendous administrative skills which were employed by Muhammad Bello, for the benefit of contemporary society.

In the first place, contemporary Nigeria has been faced with serious tribal upheavals, and corruption has become a chronic disease that defies remedy. As mentioned earlier, both the civilian and the military administrations have "tried

their best" to curb the situation, but the problem is rather on the increase. If reference is made to the Islamic principles which were employed by Muhammad Bello, where the selecting of people for appointment was based on some personal qualities and qualifications, that will go a long way in getting rid of tribalism or nepotism, and corruption in our midst. Therefore, contemporary Nigeria needs to borrow a leaf from the wealth of experiences of Muhammad Bello, who ruled successfully in generally the same geographical area but without having these vices. Our leaders also need to copy the austere measures of the Shehu and Muhammad Bello, for a true revamping of the economy [47].

It is contradictory to tell our society today to tighten their belts while those at the helm of affairs are loosening their belts. They should live an exemplary life like what had been demonstrated by the Shehu and Muhammad Bello.

Contemporary judiciary and legislature also need to take to the footsteps of the judicial system of the Sokoto caliphate under the leadership of Muhammad Bello. We learned that no judge was appointed unless he proved to be highly knowledgeable, of integrity, and could dispense justice without fear or favor. That is by heeding to what is contained in the Qur'an as the Supreme Law.

It would also be of great importance to present-day society to learn from the principles of equality as preached and employed by Muhammad Bello. Inequality, tribalism, statism, sectionalism, etc today threaten the existence of the Nigerian nation. But these were not problems to the Shehu or Muhammad Bello; why do we not take to the example provided by our able leaders and fathers?

Another serious and misleading issue that faces contemporary Society over the issue of "women's liberation". This concept is a neo-colonial legacy and merely a deceit.

From our analysis of how the Jihadists honored and respected their women folk, our women need not buy the idea of women's liberation from the Western perspective. Our women should not agree to be sold for commercialization of their integrity and dignity which was highly reserved by Shehu and his followers. Rather they (women) should take to the foot-steps of the Muslim women during the time of Shehu and Bello, who, apart from being mothers, were practically involved in the educational development of the society, as exemplified by the daughters of Shaykh Uhman bin Fodiye especially Nana Asma'u.

Our educational system also needs to borrow a lot from the educational policies of Muhammad Bello. It is an indisputable fact that the Sokoto Caliphate leaders left an intellectual landmark that to this day is not comparable to any in the Bilad al-Sudan. One cannot imagine how these people wrote hundreds of

books while at the same time, they were engaged in battles and all sorts of hardships in terms of paper, writing materials, and distribution. Today most of our learned intellectuals (Doctors and Professors) have either translated or edited these works and "bagged" Masters or Ph.D. degrees. How are we going to rate or assess these faithful servants of Allah (the authors) themselves?

Our lesson here is to de-emphasize paper qualification and face the reality of pursuing education as an instrument of development in all aspects of life, as exemplified by the leaders of the Sokoto caliphate.

In terms of economic planning and development, Muhammad Bello had set a model for us. This, he did by settling both the Muhaiirun and Ansar in Sokoto according to their professions. To this effect, he appointed leaders among the professionals who were responsible both to him and to the people. These leaders were supposed to channel all the problems of their colleagues to the authorities. Similarly, they were responsible for reporting any person who wanted to spoil the Islamic way of undertaking their work.

In the same vein, Muhammad Bello's idea of re-settling the nomadic Fulanis would be of great lesson to our policymakers and would serve as a lasting solution to the farmers-nomads clash which repeats itself now and then. These people should be settled (like what Bello did), provided with grazing reserves, and at the same time be provided in the new settlements with basic amenities such as water, electricity, education, health services, etc.

Conclusion

Muhammad Bello's leadership in the Sokoto Caliphate offers valuable lessons for contemporary society. As a visionary leader, he expanded the state's frontiers, incorporated more policies, and developed a complex government apparatus ¹. His political system was characterized by intellectual discourse, Islamic governance, social and economic development, and strategic expansion. Some of the takeaways are principled leadership: Bello's leadership was guided by Islamic values, demonstrating the importance of principled leadership in governance. Inclusive Governance. He also encouraged intellectual discourse and debate, showcasing the value of inclusive governance in responsive leadership. Holistic Development, Bello's efforts addressed social problems, emphasizing education, sanitation, and personal hygiene, highlighting the need for holistic development approaches and Strategic Expansion: He fostered the expansion of the state, drawing inspiration from history, and demonstrating the importance of strategic planning in leadership.

As a lesson for contemporary Muslims Bello employed effective governance, where he emphasizes the need for effective governance through

principled leadership, inclusive decision-making, and holistic development strategies. The need and importance of Education, the expansion of education during Bello's reign highlights the crucial role education plays in societal development. Strategic Planning, Bello's strategic expansion of the state demonstrates the importance of planning and vision in leadership.

Author Contributions

Murtala Hanafi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

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Conflict of Interest

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